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INTRODUCTION

The days of student-related problems being confined primarily to an occasional playground squabble or someone playing hooky are long gone. Today, we are seeing the problems of crime, violence, gangs, guns and drugs spilling over from the streets into our schools. These criminal activities are not exclusive to the inner city schools. They are occurring in rural and suburban areas as well. In response to increasing public concern regarding school security and safety, the Illinois State Police developed V.E.G.A. (Violence Education & Gang Awareness). V.E.G.A. was designed to meet the needs of all communities regardless of the level of school violence and gang involvement.

V.E.G.A.'s goals include stressing the importance of resolving conflicts without the use of violence, providing young people with a better understanding of the consequences they face when joining gangs and participating in acts of violence, and delivering the "same message" to both parents and their children. The curriculum is taught as a five-lesson supplement to enhance any existing prevention curriculum for fifth and sixth-grade students. The lessons emphasize cooperative learning strategies and deal in a straight forward manner with the tough situations kids are experiencing involving violence and gang activity.

"Children deserve the right to obtain an education and live their lives free of gang intimidation and threats of violence. The Illinois State Police will continue to do all we can to help uphold this right."

*Terrance W. Gainer, Director
Illinois State Police*

PROGRAM FOCUS

The philosophy of V.E.G.A. is to raise the level of awareness about gangs and violence for all members of the community and help create solutions. The V.E.G.A. curriculum consists of five student lessons and an adult community in-service session. The lesson concepts include:

- emphasizing a strong "no tolerance" message towards gangs and violence;
- increasing perception of self-worth;
- enhancing pro-social and communication skills;
- identifying positive alternative groups;
- identifying a support system;
- teaching conflict resolution skills;
- collaborative problem solving; and
- offering accurate information relating to the portrayal of gangs.

THE LESSONS

Lesson One:

"GANGS - A MATTER OF CHOICE"

The purpose of this lesson is to help students understand basic facts about gangs and the destructive consequences of gang membership. During the class period, students learn the definition of the term gang, why people join gangs, and what personal needs they may be searching to fulfill through gang association.



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Lesson Two:
“VIOLENCE AND ITS VICTIMS”

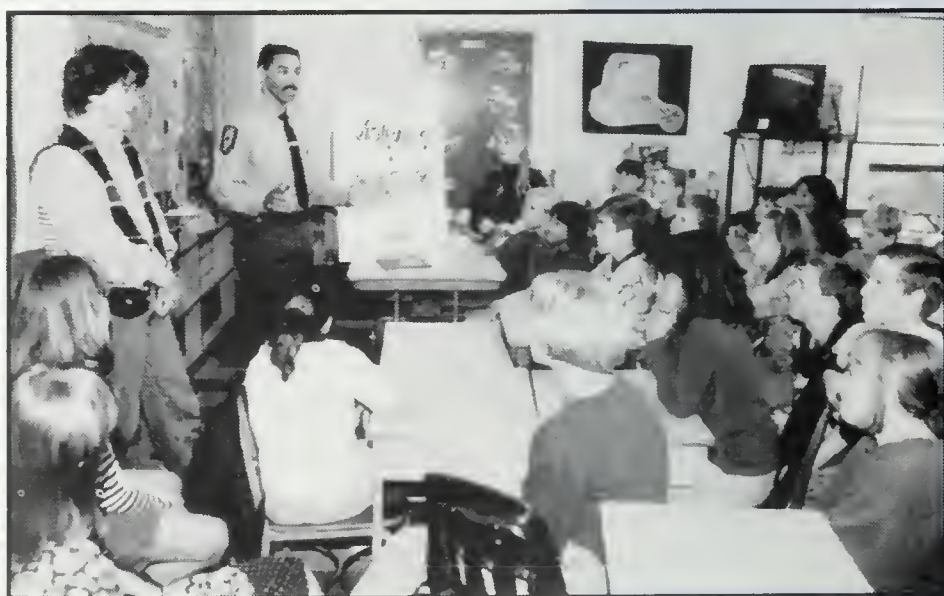
This lesson helps students discover what causes conflict and why violence is not a constructive solution. The class includes a discussion on the media's portrayal of gangs, gang members and violence. The lesson concludes with a discussion on what it means to feel safe and unsafe.

Lesson Three:
“THE CIRCLE OF VIOLENCE”

Lesson three continues to investigate the sources of violence and conflict by discussing how different ideas and feelings cause people to disagree. Students learn disappointment, frustration, and anger are feelings which everyone experiences.

Lesson Four:
“PEACEMAKERS NOT PEACEBREAKERS”

The fourth lesson focuses on problem-solving skills and pro-social skills which can help people evaluate the risks involved in a situation. Students learn how to apply these skills in order to resolve conflicts. The officer introduces the definition of the word “conflict” and the six steps in problem-solving (control, communicate, create, choose, chance it, consider advice).



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Lesson Five:
**“THINKING AHEAD: A LOOK AT
TOMORROW”**

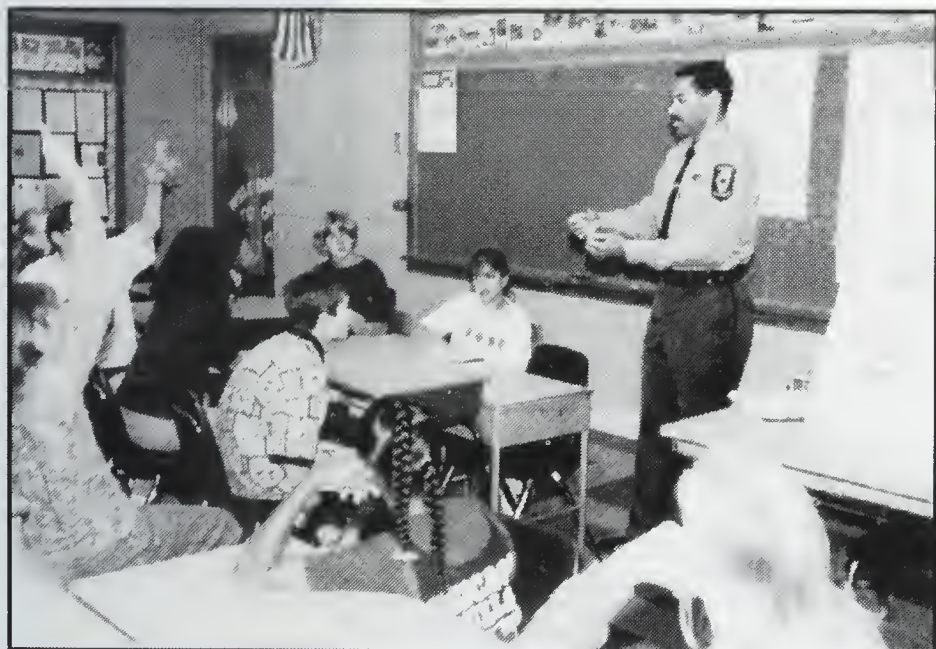
This lesson helps students understand and be empathetic to the effect people have on one another. Students learn perceptions of other people and situations are based on their own experiences, needs, values and beliefs.

Community In-Service

Parents and community members are invited to attend a public meeting after the V.E.G.A. program and the lessons which have been presented to the students. The officer briefs participants on the basic concepts the children learned in V.E.G.A. Participants examine a list of ideas compiled by students suggesting ways the student, family, school and community can help keep young people safe and free from gang involvement.

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PROGRAM DELIVERY

V.E.G.A. is taught by D.A.R.E. officers who have at least one semester of teaching experience and successfully completed the two-day V.E.G.A. training conducted by the Illinois State Police. The V.E.G.A. curriculum is designed to supplement the D.A.R.E. curriculum for fifth and sixth-grade students, but can be taught at the seventh grade level depending on community needs. In addition to being taught in the traditional school setting, V.E.G.A. has been presented at after school/evening sessions, youth camps and juvenile detention centers.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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